

VZCZCXRO9306

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLD RUEHLZ

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DE RUEHAA #0242 0461053

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P 151053Z FEB 08

FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0293

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3396

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1214

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1081

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1650

RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE 2234

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1391

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000242

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM SCUL DRL

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ONE YEAR WITHOUT PERSONALITY CULT

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov celebrated the one-year anniversary of his February 14, 2007, inauguration in private. The only public event to our knowledge -- although there may have been low-key private receptions and parties -- was a concert at the National Cultural Center in honor of the anniversary. Some ministers and deputy cabinet chairmen attended, but not all. The only speech was Speaker of Parliament Akja Nurberdiyeva's in which she announced the splendid concert hall as the new permanent home of the National Symphony Orchestra of Turkmenistan.

¶3. (SBU) The concert hall was packed to the rafters with Ashgabat's elite and a fair number of students. Charge asked several students if they were required to attend. Each answered about the same: "Are you kidding? We've waited a long time to get back to normal."

¶4. (U) The concert program was strictly symphonic, and included no "traditional culture." Composers included Bizet, Borodin, Brahms, Kachaturian, Mozart, Rossini, and Tchaikovsky, as well as Soviet-era Turkmen composers of European-style music Nury Halimmedov and Dangatar Ovezov. Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyev pointed out to Charge that the soloists were all great artists who had been banned in the latter years of the previous government. The orchestra itself was surprisingly proficient, equivalent to any second-tier orchestra in the West.

¶5. (SBU) One European ambassador commented to Charge, "We should probably be more patient with Turkmenistan. If the Soviets could create this from desert nomads in just a few decades, who can imagine what Turkmenistan will be like 50 years from now?"

HOAGLAND